

VZCZCXRO9065
OO RUEHROV
DE RUEHTH #0165 0351616
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 041616Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1152
INFO RUEHXK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

S E C R E T ATHENS 000165

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/04/2018

TAGS: GR PGOV PREL SY

SUBJECT: GREEK DFM LEADING DEL TO SYRIA

REF: SECSTATE 10786

Classified By: A/POLCOUNS JEFF HOVENIER. REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: In a series of conversations with MFA interlocutors over the last few days, Ambassador and DCM have emphasized that a planned trip by DFM Petros Doukas as head of a Greek trade delegation to Syria later this week was a bad idea that sent the wrong message to Damascus. Doukas replied that the trip had been planned for a year, had been canceled twice previously at U.S. insistence, and would be narrowly focused on trade issues. Doukas, moreover, emphasized that his message to the Syrians would be that many Greek and other EU trade opportunities existed IF Damascus altered its behavior. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (S) DCM had dinner with Doukas on the evening of February 1, at which we learned of Doukas's planned trip to Syria. Doukas emphasized that the purpose of the trip was trade promotion and to show the Syrians what sort of opportunities existed if they altered their behavior. DCM told Doukas such a tact was inadvisable and would send the Syrians the wrong message. Most of the EU was avoiding such high-level visits to Syria, DCM argued, and the visits that had taken place had not resulted in any change in Syria's actions in Lebanon or elsewhere. On February 4, while delivering reftel points on Lebanon to the PM's Diplomat Advisor Bitsios and to MFA General Secretary Agathocles, DCM again underscored U.S. opposition to the Doukas visit to Syria, noting that it would be particularly untimely on the eve of FM Bakoyannis's visit to Washington next week. They promised to raise these concerns with Bakoyannis.

¶3. (S) On February 4, Ambassador called Doukas to re-enforce our opposition to his visit and asked him to postpone or cancel it. Doukas replied that it was difficult to cancel, but said he would give the Ambassador's advice serious consideration. Doukas later called back and said that the trip would go forward, noting that it had been planned for a year and had been canceled twice before at the behest of the U.S. Canceling a third time, Doukas said, "would cause problems." He emphasized that the trip was "just business" and would facilitate interaction of Greek and Syrian businessmen. His Syrian MFA interlocutor would be a man named Dari (as heard) who, like Doukas, was focused on business issues, not Middle East politics. Doukas's message would be that the EU had much to offer Syria if it changed behavior.

¶4. (S) Doukas requested that the U.S. keep its objections to the visit private. Going public, he suggested, would simply force the Greek government into a position of having to be more forthcoming with the Syrians in the face of American pressure. Publicizing our objections would also damage Doukas personally. Ambassador made clear again that the U.S. opposed the visit.

¶5. (S) COMMENT: It appears at this point that Doukas's visit

to Syria will go forward. Although we managed to have such visits delayed or canceled in the past, this time it is less likely that further pressure will have the same result. The visit does appear to be narrowly focused on trade/business issues. Doukas is one of three DFM's and has the economic portfolio (he is essentially a Greek Wall Street type who has also written textbooks on economic history). END COMMENT.

SPECKHARD